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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this essay is to uncover the factors which have so greatly affected the educational and social aspect of the Puerto Rican's life in the New York metropolitan area. It is concluded that school systems are obviously not going to foster disorder or encourage criticism. The initiative is up to the community. The Puerto Rican community still needs to be educated as to its rights and responsibilites. But many are beginning to organize, to ask questions, to attend meetings of the Boards of Education. The awakened interest in Puerto Rican pupils is a direct result from an awakening Puerto Rican community. Two themes must be singled out for future work: (1) the complexity of language functioning, and (2) the complexity of the social settings in which language is employed. A lack of awareness of these very different sets of complexities has frequently led to unjustified generalizations. Four specific suggestions for action on the part of the community are made (1) to carefully assess the needs of the children in terms of language, academic subjects, tutorial services, extra-curricular activities, etc.; (2) to state explicitly the community's expectations of the school; (3) to state explicitly the objectives which the community feels education should fulfill; and, (4) to state the role which should be played by the parent in the activities of the school. (Author/JM)

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The American Pressure Cooker

... The Puerto Rican

On the Mainland

A Research Paper Presented To

Dr. J. F. Wase

Kean College of New Jersey

In Partial Fulfillment Of

The Course Requirements For

Social Stratification

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by

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and

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THE AMERICAN PRESSURE COOKER

... THE PUERTO RICAN ON THE MAINLAND

I. Introduction

We live in a world which seems to be forever applauding theories which are diametrically opposed to the very core of human existance. We keep on becoming victims of the romanticized utopian societies. Fascism, communism, and the melting pot are just a few examples of the kind of thinking which denies the rights of individuals to be different. To pretend that all peoples should somehow abandon their particular idiosyncrasies and backgrounds in order to become alike is to deny the inherent factor in human nature which urges each one of us to be himself -- the basic human quality of wanting to better one's condition, which has taken us from caves to skyscrapers in a relatively short period of time.

The generation which invented the myth of the melting pot was displaying a variety of emotions and thought patterns which are detrimental to the development of individual initiative and pride. The melting pot was an oversimplified and naive answer to the problem of cultural differences and acculturation.

When the social scientist speaks of acculturation, he usually refers to "a process of mutual influence of two cultures which are in contact."[1] In practice, however, acculturation implies a process of changing emphasis and loyalties from one language and culture to another, specifically, "the change in language and culture of a conquered group to that of the conqueror."[2] Only recently have we begun to realize the fallacy of wanting all men to abandon their past and become alike in all respects.

> What is inalienable in the life of mankind is its intrinsic positive quality -- its psychological inheritance. Men may change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religions, their philosophies, to a greater or lesser entent: They cannot change their grandfathers... The selfhood which is inalienable in them, and for the realization of which they require 'inalienable' liberty, is ancestrally determined, and the happiness which they pursue has its form implied in ancestral endowment.[3]

The often-heard cliche these days is that we are a nation of immigrants. This is an unquestionable fact. But, whereas the Italians, the Irish and the Polish might have consented to changing language and culture, the immigrants of recent years have refused to be completely alienated from their backgrounds. Among the immigrants of the past twenty-five years Spanish speaking immigrants are a majority. Of these, the Puerto Ricans are the second largest Spanish-speaking group on the mainland (1.5 million on the mainland.)[4]

This heavy influx of Spanish speakers has made the United States of America the fifth largest Spanish-speaking nation in the Western Hemisphere (after Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, and Peru.) Yet, the fact that we are in practice a bilingual nation is not exactly shouted from the rooftops. To the melting pot mentality this is actually a defect for the "Sameness Creed."

The suppression of cultural differences has produced a crisis in the Puerto Rican's fight for cultural survival. The social explosions which we are experiencing today are the end-product of all the years of lack of communication between cultures.

In the present work we have attempted to uncover the factors which have so greatly affected the educational and social aspects of the Puerto Rican's life in our Metropolitan area. Teh problem of the bilingual child goes beyond a mere language difficulty and becomes a matter of culture shock and destroyed self-image. The implications in the areas of education and sociology are not all immediately obvious, but must nevertheless be investigated in order to achieve an effective plan for intercultural respect and cooperation.

The melting pot is dead. It was a fairy-tale, a utopia -- and like all utopian societies, it was impractical and did not take into consideration that mankind is not all mass but individual as well.

The generation that invented the melting pot ended up inventing the American pressure cooker...

II. The Puerto Rican on the Island

Puerto Rico is a democracy-conscious culture whose people are publicly proud of their six decades of association with a nation which has been regarded by the world as one of the greatest of democratic nations. The commonwealth Constitution is a model of democratic principles. All religions are free to worship. Race discrimination is unlawful. The public schools are modeled upon the North American pattern, and the children are taught the rights and duties of citizens living in a democratic country.

The considerable advances in industrialization made by the Popular Government in the past ten years have not yet suceeded in altering the Puerto Rican economy. Unemployment is high, the yearly average usually totalling around 10% of the labor force. While the insular economy is till strongly agrarian the situation is now changing, particularly with respect to urban migration. Urbanizaion has grown steadily, accelerating in the past decade, and now stands at 60%.

This process of industrialization on the island already poses a cultural problem. Max Weber has noted that, in order for a nation to industrialize, "the villager has to break with tradition and subject himself to the relative insecurity of the impersonal urban market."[5] Weber goes on to explain that the success of the worker may in part depend on the extent to which he can abandon traditional obligations.[6]

Literacy rates have also increased greatly. While only one-fifth of the population over ten years of age could be classified

as literate in 1900, three-fourths of the present day population can read and write.[7]

A. The Family - Sex Roles

We may assume that the family ideals are undergoing rapid change in the island. The changes in attitudes, however, are not always accompanied by changes in practice. For example, while the jibaro (peasant man) once wanted all the children that God sent him, his ideal now is three children, and feels that a family has the right to limit the number of its children.[8]

Despite attitudinal changes, the Puerto Rican birth rate has not dropped appreciably. We are left with the difficult task of reconciling Puerto Rican high fertility rates wtih the change in family-size preference among the population.

Before attributing this anomaly solely to the relative absence within the lower classes of technical means with which to achieve lower rates of fertility, it is desirable to examine those institutions and cultural patterns which may work counter to low fertility ideals.

Two principal patterns help explain the relationship between family and fertility in Puerto Rico: 1) Differential sex status and role is such as to encourage family limitation on the part of the wife and discourage it on the part of the husband; 2)Subsequent to high fertility peformance in a given family, certain individuals and institutional mechanisms operate to alleviate the pressure of numbers on the available resources.

Concerning the differential sex status and role, the rigorous subordination of the woman is a normal concomitant of rural living,

where a sharp division of labor relegates wage-earning activities to the male. Spanish-Catholic patterns fit neatly into this type of economy. The virginity cult,[9] fostered by religious ideology and accompanied by severe limitations on the freedom of the female, help to insure continuous dominance of the male in the economic and political spheres.

Even in the middle and upper class families, where the subordination patterns are less emphasized, though nonetheless effective, male dominance is partly insured by secrecy on the part of husbands. A feature of upper class living is separate sex recreation and illicit affairs. This privilege of privacy concerning the husband's business and pleasure enshrouds much of his life with mystery and enhances his role as an authority figure.

For the lower class, the differential status and role has other manifestations, consequences of which have a more direct effect upon fertility. This is not because the double standard is more strictly enforced in the lower class, but because there are fewer compensating institutions. It is this discrepancy between male and female status and role that forestalls the establishment of adequate communication between the marital pair, and results not only in an unstable marital relationship, but in higher fertility rates.

In the pre-marital period, the double standard takes on several important manifestations. The society, particularly the males, place a high premium on masculinity and virility. To be a macho (a virile male) is one of the dominant values which is inculcated into the male child and which continues to be valued in manhood. This male ethic is supported by s permissiveness in regard to behavior. The

society allows the male a great deal of freedom for socio-sexual exploration with prostitutes and mujeres baratas (cheap women.)

For the woman precisely the opposite prescription exists. The cult to virginity puts a premium on modesty and sublimation or repression of sexual desires. Relative to the lower class male her behavior is heavily circumscribed. She is surrounded by cultural obstacles to socio-sexual experimentation and her experience with males may be largely confined to her own kin.

The male, tantalized by his sexual and expensive contacts with prostitutes has a decided sexual appetite at marriage. But the woman, due to thorough childhood training, tends to regard sex as a necessary evil, and enters the marital relation with an attitude toward sex ranging from ignorance to revulsion.[10]

The already existing gap between the sexes may be further widened after marriage. The male sexual interest may only serve to increase his wife's indifference or distaste. His inability to distinguish between his attitudes toward his wife and toward prostitutes serves to increase his own conflict or frustration. This, in turn, results in diminished understanding between the sexes. This gulf is not only present with regard to sexuality, but also with regard to procreation. In the area of procreation, the male derives more immediate gratification from children than does the woman.

For the lower class male there are few available channels for prestige. The most important economic advancement is unavailable to him. Due to the scarcity of land, the seasonal nature of employment, and the surplus of labor, he can scarcely provide the basic necessities of life for himself and his family.[11] Consequently, his two chief sources of prestige are virility and fatherhood.

Machismo will provide him with respect from his peers, and being un buen padre (a good father) respect from his community. Both show, in the thinking of the insular culture, that he is most of all a man. And, since fatherhood and virility are intimately related in the Puerto Rican culture, the more pregnancies he can claim, the more he has proven his machismo.

For obvious reasons, women are more small-family minded than men. Whereas the male finds in fatherhood a way of proving his virility, each pregnancy becomes for the uneducated woman another source of frustration and fear. In a study conducted by Holt, it was reported that 6.6% of the married women interviewed reported that their husbands desired more children than they, while only 1.8% of the husbands interviewed desired fewer children.[12]

Contraceptives are still downplayed in the Puerto Rican culture. This is so because of a combination of male resistance to contraceptive techniques and male dominance in the sexual relation. Women cannot resort to contraception for themselves, because the pre-marital circunscriptions concerning sex education prior to marriage prevent the knowledge of birth control for large numbers of lower class women. Since the male controls the sexual situation, the female is not in a position of demanding its implementation. Modesty prohibits the female from requesting birth control information from clinics with male physicians.[13]

The high fertility patterns, then produce further tension in the marital relationship, and often drastic means are required in order to alleviate psychological and economical pressures. These pressures often induce wives to resort to sterilization and sexual denial, thus impelling the husband to desertion or marital infidelity.

Sterilization is one of the most popular birth control measures on the island. Though less than 3% of the lower rental group mothers in Holt's study had been sterilized, it is among this group that sterilization is becoming increasingly popular. This method is one of the few on which both husband and wife agree. The male who has proved his virility by several past pregnancies can avoid the economic pressure of children without losing his pleasure or sense of respect for his wife.

When sterilization is too expensive, difficult to arrange, or too dangerous, the woman must then resort to complete sexual denial, as was found in a study of 37 lower class women.[14]

B. The Extended Family and Familism

Because of easy shifting of funds and personnel from one nuclear family to another within a broad kinship system, it is largely the extended family that provides relief from the pressures of numbers upon resources. Before describing the shock-absorbing qualities of the extended family, however, it seems pertinent to demonstrate to what extent such a structure exists in Puerto Rico.

There is some evidence indicating that as many extended kin live under the same roof as income permits. Thus, as fertility drops, the income available per household member is greater. While the income is greater, the size of the household also increases. Roberts and Steffani found that 17.5% of the households earning less than $500 yearly had one or two members only. In the $2,000 income bracket, only 6% had such small households.[15]

Another evidence of familism is the extent to which children and relatives contribute to the family income. In only about half of the

households is the father the sole source of support. Sons and daughters contribute about a quarter of the support and other relatives about 5%.[16] Holt's data shows that many parents think of their children as security for old age, and it seems likely that filial devotion is still strong in the island.[17]

Familism becomes a substitute for community cooperation. The jibaro's sense of individualism as regards marriage and personal property are greater than his sense of community responsibility. The seeming lack of conern for privacy is another hindrance to community living. Given the physically cramped living quarters of the lower class (58% of the Puerto Rican rural families average two or more per room)[18], and the general intimacy of family members, it is not surprising that lower class Puerto Ricans on the mainland startle social workers by their desire for interpersonal contacts and lack of concern with privacy.

The family unit in Puerto Rico is a microcosmic community where each member experiences affection, frustration, even rejection. The extended family, by means of informal adoption and through channels such as compadrazo, serves to cushion the impact of high fertility on any given family. By a process of supply and demand, a situation is brought into equilibrium in a manner which relieves the situation of a particular family, but not that of the society.

C. Catholic Dogmas vs. Popular Folklore

One of the paradoxes of Puerto Rican culture is the disparity between formal affiliation with the Catholic Church and a meager concern for its religious ceremonials and dogmas. Its significance

for our problem is obvious, since strict formality has no place in the spontaneous popular culture. Virtually all Puerto Ricans claim they believe in God, as well as in immortality. Other place greater importance on the Christian belief in human brotherhood and personal sanctity.

Several explanations have been given for the lack of unity in beliefs among the Catholic population. One is the clergy's reputation of indifference towards the personal and social welfare of the common people. Other factors contributing to the disparity of the Church are: 1) The use of Latin rather than Spanish in the Catholic rituals; 2) Remoteness of churches in many rural settlements; 3) Expense of ceremonials; 4) Living up to the stern principles of Catholicism.

The problem of morality is closely related to religion for obvious reasons. The ideological code is influenced by the Christian doctrine, especially the Sixth Commandment. This problem is complicated by the traditional practices of concubinage and the double standard. Although both practices were said to be decreasing, no one contended that they have become negligible.

The Christian theology completely repudiates both pre-marital and extra-marital sex relations; the secular cultural ideology tolerates, if it does not openly condone, these relations. The double standard allows these relations for the male, while the female is subject to the "virginity cult."

Despite inconsistencies, it seems that Puerto Ricans are more successful in harmonizing their explicit and implicit attitudes than are their counterparts of the mainland. At least the non-religious aspects of moral tradition are more tolerant of common-

law marriages than other cultures.

Another paradox in the Puerto Rican's claim to Catholicism is the major role played by the spiritualist medium. Social scientists have made a number of studies of interrelations between the social system and mental illness. The spiritualist in Puerto Rican culture performs a therapeutic role as a quasi-professional thought of as being in the medical sphere.

Studies show that people in lower classes will contact a spiritualist medium before they will go to a psychiatrist. At the same time, local psychiatrists are aware of the folk therapist and his value to the popular culture, and often will try to work together with the medium. Some reports might lead us to conclude that the lower classes rely upon the spiritualist beliefs and practices as therapeutic outlets for mental illnesses.

Spiritualism is the belief that the visible world is surrounded by an invisible world populated by spirits. The beliefs and practices of spiritualism are distributed throughout the society with a relatively pronounced tendency to concentrate on the lower classes.

The spiritualists are divided into two schools: The upper-class spiritualists insist on the scientific and experimental character of their belief, while the lower class spiritualists are irrational and superstitious. Both schools of spiritualism provide social meaning to its troubled participants.

Spiritualism is conterminous with social life in the lower class. It is woven into the intimate trials, strife, and personal turmoil that enmesh the members of a socially and economically deprived stratum. Its function is to discharge the tensions and anxieties generated in

other areas of social life. The spiritualist medium claims competence in the interpretation and treatment of pathological symptoms. Along with this, the spiritualist as a believer and participant takes the stigma from an afflicted person and "heals" the person. Spiritualism serves its believers without their suffering the stigma associated with psychiatric agencies.

The spiritualist meetings are structured around four social roles: 1) the head medium; 2) the auxiliary medium; 3) participants; 4) those without faculties.

The therapeutic advantages of this group psychotherapy are apparent, given the popular beliefs, values, aspirations, and problems. Participation in a spiritualist group serves to structure, define, and render behavior institutionally meaningful, which is otherwise perceived as aberrent.

D. The Role of Government

Explicitly and implicitly, Puerto Rican culture is overwhelmingly devoted to the slogans of democracy. It is believed that the common man idolizes his elected leaders to the point that too much responsibility is left up to the rulers by way of policy-making and implementations of laws. However, the degree and kind of acceptance of authority figures varies.

The habit of relying heavily on leaders derives from a mixture of Hispanic, religious, and colonial traditions -- a habit symbolized by the term personalismo, and connoting deep respect for persons in authority.

With regard to the problems of race relations, viewed in the context of democratic beliefs, racial equality is not only support-

ted by law, but widely accepted both ideologically and in overt conduct.

E. The Role of Education

The official ideology of Puerto Rican education endorses a building of a unified culture economically, religiously, and politically. At the same time, its leadership would probably admit that these ideals have not as yet been implemented in everyday practice, except to a limited extent. Much of the curricula, teaching methods, and most rules are still made by the central office, and the lower classes see no reason to change this procedure.

The concept of race equality has produced a movement for education toward complete achievement as an implicit cultural pattern. The only problem seems to be in the fact that the Department of Education promotes into its administrative positions Caucasian personnel, rather than the Blacks, who are in most cases better qualified for the positions.[19]

In practice, however, education takes a back seat to the need for employment. When the child becomes old enough to work, necessity usually dictates that he seek employment rather than continue his education.

E. The Culture of Poverty

Poverty in Puerto Rico is a specific conceptual model that describes in positive terms a subculture of Western society with its own structures and rationale -- a way of life handed down from

generation to generation along family lines.

The culture of poverty is not just a matter of deprivation or disorganization. It is a culture in the traditional anthropological sense in that it provides human beings with a design for living, with a ready-made set of solutions for human problems, and so serves a significant adaptive function.[20]

The setting of Puerto Rican poverty is that of a cash economy, with wage labor and production for profit, and with a persistent high rate of unemployment and underemployment, at low wages for unskilled labor. The society fails to provide social, political and economic organization on either a voluntary basis by government imposition, for the low income population.

The dominant class asserts a set of values which prizes thrift and the accumulation of wealth and property, stresses the possibility of upward mobility and explains low economic status as the result of individual personal inadequacy and inferiority.

Once the culture of poverty comes into existence, it tends to perpetuate itself. The slum children have usually absorbed the basic attitudes and values of their subculture by the time they are six or seven years old. Thereafter, they are psychologically unprepared to take full advantage of changing conditions or improving opportunities that may develop in their lifetime. The nonintegration of the poor in major institutions is also a crucial element in the culture of poverty. It reflects the combined effect of a variety of factors which include economic poverty, segregation and discimination, fear suspicion, and apathy. The poor do not belong to labor unions or political parties, and make little use of banks, hospitals, department stores, or museums.

A relief system which barely keeps people alive perpetuates rather than eliminates poverty and the pervading sense of hopelessness. The people in this culture produce little wealth and receive little in return. Chronic unemployment, low wages, lack of property, lack of savings, absence of food reserves and chronic shortage of cash, imprison the family and the individual in a vicious circle. Thus, due to lack of cash, the slum dweller makes frequent purchases of small quantities of food, and thus ends up paying higher prices. The slum economy shows a high incidence of borrowing at usurious rates of interest, informal credit arrangements among neighbors, use of second-hand clothing, and second-hand furniture.

The poor family, though aware of middle class values, is unable to live up to middle class standard. These values are discussed, but not adhered to.

Childhood in the slum is not cherished, as it is an especially prolonged and protected stage in the life cycle. Initiation into sex comes early in life. In spite of verbal emphasis on family solidarity, sibling rivalry for the limited supply of goods and maternal affection is intense.

The individual who grows up in this culture has strong feelings of fatalism, helplessness, dependence and inferiority. The poor individual reflects a weak ego structure, confusion of sexual identification, strong present-time orientation with relatively little disposition to defer gratification and plan for the future, and a high tolerance for pathological afflictions of all kinds.

The culture of the Puerto Rican slum dweller bears no resemblance to the middle class environment which will make demands on him once he moves to the mainland. Rather than making him aware of

different options, the middle class will impose living standard on him, thus producing the belligerent attitude which characterizes the Puerto Rican in our Metropolitan area.

III. The Puerto Rican Child on the Mainland

In considering the acculturation of the Puerto Rican child, we must bear in mind that he usually begins by being a monolingual child. He learns the language of his parents and becomes a member of their culture. In this respect, he is no different from any other child. The special problems confronting the bilingual child arise when his home language and culture are supplemented or replaced by a second language and culture imposed on him by society.

During the first five or six years of his life, the Puerto Rican child "undergoes a process of acculturation which imprints its effects much more indelibly than any other process he will go through in the remainder of his life."[21] He will discover that the meanings which have been given to him in one culture do not necessarily exist in the second culture and therefore cannot be replaced. Only now are we learning to face the consequences of this process of imposed acculturation which the child must undergo.

Among the variety of problems which confront education in the Metropolitan area, the problem of the non-English speaking child, specifically the Puerto Rican child, is among the greatest. The Puerto Rican child seems to be especially susceptible to difficulties in school. Alarmingly high rates of academic retardation among these children in reading and mathematics are of special concern. A greater number of high school students are leaving school before graduation and those who do complete secondary school programs find that they are not well prepared for employment. Very few people have made an honest attempt to understand the difficulties encountered by Puerto Rican children. Many

legislators showed their lack of knowlege on the subject during the recent debate on the New Jersey State proposed legislation on Bilingual Education. Several persons, who incidentally were not educators, reduced the problem of the bilingual child to merely a language difficulty.[22] The inability to communicate is a grave problem, and it is not our intent to diminish its impact on the child; however, the problem of the bilingual child goes deeper than his temporary loss of speech.

> The observer can but dimly discern the everyday frustrations which many Puerto Rican schoolchildren have come to take for granted: their imperfect grasp of English, which often seals both their lips and their minds; their confusion about who they are (what race? what culture?), a confusion compounded by the common ravages of white prejudice: their sense of being lost, of traveling through a foreign country with a heedless guide and an undecipherable map.[23]

A. Language barriers

Many of the Bilingual Programs in our area emphasize, and rightly so, the instruction of English to non-native speakers. Language hinders the child from being able to achieve academic success. For example, test scores of sixth grade students in the Newark school district place the average Puerto Rican child about three years behind the average white child in all three categories of achievement (verbal ability, reading comprehension, and math.)[24]

The following examples, which point out the relevance of verbal communication, were gathered by Richard Margolis during visitations to different schools in the Metropolitan area:

- A six-year-old was roundly scolded by his teacher for wetting his pants. All morning he had been trying to tell her - in Spanish! - that he had to go to the bathroom.

- Jose Gonzalez, a kindergartener, has given up trying to tell his teacher his name is not Joe. It makes her angry.
- A little girl couldn't wait to get her first report card. But when the report card finally arrived, there was nothing written on it except two big letters: "LD". Language Difficulty.[25]

Puerto Rican children do eventually develop an acceptable level of communication skills in English - "street" English, if you will, but nevertheless intelligible enough to serve as a means of communication.

Language difficulty is only part of the story.

B. Middle class values vs. the Puerto Rican Child

The majority of immigrants from the island are members of the lower income classes. The Puerto Rican migration to New York, unchecked by immigration laws, has been a source of prosperity for the island. It upgraded the migrants, converted them from rural to urban people, relieved the island of some of its labor surplus, and sent plenty of cash back home. Yet, the culture of poverty seems to perpetuate itself in an almost incomprehensible manner.

One the mainland, the Puerto Rican family falls prey to unscrupulous landlords who charge exhorbitant prices for minimal living facilities. Even though the majority of Puerto Rican families have incomes above poverty levels (see Appendix I), the size of the family prevents the family from living adequately on that income.

In the Puerto Rican child, social class patterns are combined with Puerto Rican culture patterns, the result being a social and cultural milieu that is neither understood nor accepted by the middle class teacher.

Many of the middle class teachers and principals still view the Puerto Rican child in terms of the prevailing prejudices, cliches and stereotypes. This way of thinking is further reinforced by the Boards of Education whose members reflect middle class norms and values.

Rather than academic and related knowledge areas, the emphasis is often placed on having the Puerto Rican child conform and learn the values of the middle class society. The child is not only short-changed in his educational experience, but made to feel that his home culture and environment is somehow inferior to that which is being imposed on him:

> ... when the child begins to discover that the teacher does not understand, he develops negative reactions not only to the teacher but to the educational process, and finally to the entire culture and language which the teacher represents. Or conversely, he may decide that his parents have provided him with an inferior world, and subsequently attempt to reject entirely what they have provided for him as a cultural base upon which to build a meaningful life.[26]

The education of the Puerto Rican must be understood within the context of this conflict in cultural and social class values.

The role of education in every society is practically similar in intent: Education is the tool which government employs in order to perpetuate a certain set of values, standards, and to promote desirable skills. Emile Durkheim defines education thus:

> ... the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to stimulate and develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual, and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole, and by the particular milieu for which he is specifically destined...[27]

The conflict of educational goals between the mainland and Puerto Rico poses a further problem for the child when he enters school. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that Puerto Rican children are expected to contribute to the support of the household. Seeking employment is of a greater priority than finishing school. And these are further offenses against the middle class bureaucracy, whose patience is already running short with the peculiarities of the Puerto Rican's culture.

C. Dropouts or Transfers?

A lot of Puerto Rican elementary students are disappearing before they reach high school. In Newark, for example, there are more than five thousand Puerto Ricans in public schools. They account for eight percent of all elementary students, but only four percent of all high school students.[28]

The widespread policy of retaining or putting back Puerto Rican teenagers because of language difficulty is one major cause for dropping out. Rather than be placed among children three and four years younger than himself, the Puerto Rican teenager decides to quit school altogether.

"We get an inkling of these difficulties by looking at Hoboken's dropout figures for 1967. Of the 149 students who dropped out, 131 'left to seek employment'."[29]

Finally, some school principals insist they have no serious dropout problems among Puerto Rican students. "Puerto Rican students who leave school are not really dropouts - they are simply transfers to another school."[30]

Not all school systems, however, deny that dropouts exist. New York and Hoboken are somewhat more frank on the subject of

dropouts. But as of yet no stepts have been taken in the Metropolitan area to alleviate the problem, to motivate the Puerto Rican child to want to learn.

A research team under the leadership of Caplan and Ruble submitted that the achievement of bilingual students is affected by a number of factors, not one of which is directly evident within the school. Five theoretical constrcuts were posed in relation to the school achievement of these children. Although this research took place in Albuquerque, we suggest that the same findings might be applicable to Puerto Rican children in the Metropolitan area:

1... students from bilingual backgrounds lack essential communicative skills in the school, and... their lack of these skills has an adverse effect upon their achievement as measured by standardized tests.

2... bilingual students may have somewhat higher potentialities than monolingual students from a similar environment.

3... bilingual students demonstrate... that the values held in the home are different from those held by the community as a whole.

4... bilingual students have not been encouraged by the home to value certain personality characteristics which contribute to school achievement.

5... bilingual students are culturally different from other, monolingual students.[31]

Admittedly, the Puerto Rican population is placing greater strain on the urban school systems, which are already heavily laden with more than their share of "deprived" children and insufficient budgets.

Nevertheless, there are 400,000 Puerto Rican children enrolled in our public schools.[32] How well are the schools responding to this challenge?

IV. The Schools in the Metropolitan Area

The schools seem to be responding, but rather reluctantly. Most school systems think they have achieved their goal simply if their Puerto Rican enrollment goes up.

The problem seems to be uniformity in bilingual programs. Obviously, one system of bilingual education will not be applicable to the entire nation, or even to the entire New York Metropolitan area. But philosophies are often ambiguous, and programs often lack specific goals and objectives. Bilingual program guides are written in ideological terms, and therefore, the program fails to achieve their unrealistic goals.

> The programs are a mixed bag. Ther are after-school tutorials and before school breakfasts; teaching English as a second language and teaching English as a first language; bilingual approaches and non-lingual approaches; teacher visits to Puerto Rican homes and teacher 'visitations' to Puerto Rico; efforts to make parents feel welcome and efforts to make parents feel guilty; seminars to convince teachers that Puerto Rican children have 'special cultural needs' and seminars to convince teahcers that Puerto Rican children are 'just like everybody else.' Every program boasts its own point-or-view; and every point-or-view seems to boast its own program.[33]

A. Changing Attitudes in Teaching

Perhaps we are all willing to admit to the existence of some teachers who will openly defy and insult Puerto Rican children in the classroom. Puerto Rican parents can usually tell several such stories concerning their own children. The fact of the matter is that these teachers are a minority. There is a subtle type of prejudice which is perhaps more harmful than overt prejudice,

because it is more difficult to detect and, therefore, more difficult to erradicate.

The teacher we usually encounter in this last category is likely to be white, middle class, and eager to teach. Being thoroughly American, she will subscribe to the great American belief that "prejudice is bad", will condemn the more radical symptoms of bigotry, but will allow herself the luxury of being "tolerant". If asked, she will deny that there are any differences among her students. Her intentions may be sincerely good, but her facts are slightly distorted.

Any teacher who denies authentic cultural differences among the students is practicing a subtle form of tyranny. She is imposing - not ecplicitly, of course - the utopian creed that "All people should pretend to be the same." Thus, without regard for the mother culture of the child, the teacher becomes the object of detestation and fear on the part of the minority children she is trying to "save" or convert."

The teacher who is ignorant of the mother culture of the child often forces the child to down-right disobey the cultural traditions which have been taught to him since he can remember. One striking example is the teacher who insisted that a Puerto Rican student look her straight in the eyes while she was being scolded. The teacher was actually asking the child to be disrespectful, since in the island lowering the eyes is a sign of acknowledging authority.

Many school systems have recognized the grave problems which can be caused by the teacher's lack of knowledge of the students' culture. There are two mehtods which are widely used throughout the area: teacher tours and teacher seminars. These methods have their

limitations: The island tours, no matter how serious in purpose, usually become tourist-oriented. The seminars would be valuable -- if more teachers would attend them. Other programs teach some Spanish vocabulary to classroom teachers. The advantages for the teacher are great, since, no matter how limited her knowledge of the language, the Puerto Rican students feel closer to a person with whom they can at least communicate.

The language situation could also be improved by placing more Puerto Rican bilingual personnel in the classroom, and more Puerto Ricans in administrative and counselling positions.

The teachers' attitudes are changing, slowly. Many of them do not yet realize the importance of in-service training which is aimed at helping to solve some of the problems due to lack of communication -- verbally and culturally. But the first step has been taken in the right direction.

B. How are we meeting the needs of our children?

Schools have recognized the "language problem" of the Puerto Rican children and are thus instituting traditional responses: tutorial sessions, orientation courses, and other special courses to saturate the Spanish-speaking child with English vocabulary. These schools which subscribe to the adage that "The medium is the message" sustain that the child cannot learn in school until he learns the school's language.

Though the argument seems logical, the results have been disastrous. Too often the child is placed in the classroom knowing some English, but not sufficient to make progress in academic

subjects. "His Spanish is inhibited and his English is sketchy."[34] And he thus becomes illiterate in two languages.

The child becomes frustrated and anxious. Schools are often encouraging the radical idea that the child must forget Spanish in order to successfully learn English.

More and more educators, however, are realizing that, in a sense, it is easier to change the language of the school, than the language of the child. They are finally accepting U.N.E.S.C.O.'s axiom that the best medium for teaching a child is his native tongue.[35]

The basic tenets of Bilingual Education are: that a child can learn more when taught in his native language, and that children can gradually learn a second language if it is introduced in the context of other subject matter. The studies from throughout the world prove this theory overwhelmingly. In view of such studies, we must conclude that a child can learn a second language more easily and with greater comprehension of his initial instruction is received in the vernacular. Here are a few of these studies carried out by U.N.E.S.C.O.:

> Sweden: Children in the experimental group had an initial ten weeks of reading instruction in Pitean, the local dialect. They then advanced to classes conducted in literary Swedish. A second Pitean-speaking group received all reading instruction in literary Swedish.
> At the end of the first ten weeks, the Pitean-taught group had progressed further in reading than the Swedish-taught group. At the end of a year, the experimental froup did significantly better on word recognition and in speed and accuracy of reading in literary Swedish than the control group did.
>
> Chiapas, Mexico: Children in three Indian tribes were included in this study. Teachers were recruited from the local population, and the students were taught reading in the vernacular. When they had mastered the vernacular

> primers, they entered first grade, where the texts were in Spanish. Reading tests conducted in Spanish showed that students initially taught in the vernacular read with greater comprehension than those taught from the beginning in Spanish. The study also suggests that the teacher's ability to communicate with students may have outweighed their training or education level.[36]

The bilingual approach, obviously does not offer all the answers, but is the most promising technique available today for the instruciton of non-native speakers. It provides not only the content areas in the native language, but it bridges the cultural gap between the home environment and the school. This affective area of learning is talked about constantly by teachers and administrators; yet actions prove that the words are not taken seriously.

The strengths of the bilingual programs, then, are psychological as well as linguistic. A Spanish-speaking teacher in the classroom not only speaks a familiar language, but also creates a familiar atmosphere which helps the child adjust to his new surroundings and frees him to concentrate on his main task, that of learning.

C. Communications with Parents and Community

"Schools have a tendency to include parents in their list of frustrations and to exclude them in their deliberations."[37] Principals are constantly clamoring for parent participation, when all they really seek is a go-ahead sign from the parents. The school officials complain that Puerto Rican parents take no real interest in the school and seldom come to meetings. In interviewing

several parents in the Hudson County area, we found out that Spanish parents are rarely invited to PTA meetings, and when they do attend, their comments are not welcome.

The PTA has become an instrument for the principal's policy-making, rather than for community action. Given the one-sidedness of the organization, one can understand why parents stay at home.

Puerto Rican parents usually begin by thinking that the school can do no wrong and end up by suspecting that schools can do no right. Over the years, attitudes change from respectful reluctance to to interfere, to an angry spirit of protest.

The problem of mobility -- the instability of the home -- is a hindrance to involving parents in the school's activities. Yet, evidence points to the fact that the schools are simply not trying to involve the Puerto Rican parent in the activities of the school.

The cultural barrier is discernible once more. On the island, the teacher is regarded with great respect and students often look upon him as a second parent. The teacher is expected to handle all problems that might arise during a school day. On the mainland, however, the American teacher would rather be a professional than a surrogate parent, and when the child presents too many problems, the teacher simply calls on the parent for help. This is common procedure in American schools, but it strikes the Puerto Rican parent as lack of responsibility on the teacher's part. Teachers will argue that parents are no doing enough at home, and parents will complain that the teachers are not doing their job. The point is that the subject is seldom argued at all. There is rarely any kind of meaningful dialogue between parents and teachers.

Schools are, however, trying to break down the barriers. Some districts have community representatives (unfortunately appointed by the principal) who act as liaison persons between the community and the schools. Other districts, such as Philadelphia, have enlisted the help of mothers in organizing cultural projects which will be presented in the classroom.

New York's community relations program has 148 bilingual specialists, and among their responsibilities is that of bridging the gap between school and community.[38]

Communication has had a sluggish start. The problem of the bilingual child has had such great political overtones that many community members prefer not to make waves. The community, and the school, are often intimidated.

But the responsibility of the educator remains nevertheless. And the rights of the Puerto Rican child must be respected in order that he may grow to be a productive adult, not a frustrated individual without real goals and aspirations.

V. The Puerto Rican Adult - Steamed Enough?

Cultural differences have sometimes been overplayed in discussions of disadvantaged groups. Idiosyncrasies of culture are of more interest and use to the tourist than to the advocate of progress and change. We are not contradicting ourselves. Even though we have emphasized the important role of culture in teaching the Puerto Rican child, we do not claim that the differences should be overplayed between Puerto Rican children and other children. Neither do we believe that a particular culture must remain intact. This would deny interaction and progress. This overemphasizing of the cultural differences has often come across as a put-down, and the Puerto Rican is quick in his reaction to insults.

The cultural environment of the New York metropolitan area poses several problems to the Puerto Rican who grew up in the island. First of all, the male Puerto Rican finds his sex role challenged. If he is the head of a household, his machismo must now be proven not by procreation but by his ability to support his family. If he is an unskilled worker, as are most of the Puerto Ricans who come to the mainland, chances are that he will experience the same lack of stability as he did on the island. He will find that his role of authority figure will diminish.

The female Puerto Rican will find that she must share the responsibility of supporting the family and supplement the husband's income. Often the female's income is the sole source of support for the family.

The frustrations of the male often force him to abandom the home, thus leaving the female as the sole authority figure in the

household. The Puerto Rican child is surrounded by no success stories as he grows older. He finds little to emulate.

But the Puerto Rican sense of frustration has now begun to explode into militancy and angry protest, and society as a whole is becoming increasingly aware of his plight.

In an attempt to fulfill some of the innumerable needs of the Spanish-speaking minorities in the country, the President has established a Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish Speaking People. This committee, which operates under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labor, has as its main task the advisement of federal agencies concerning different programs which would benefit the Spanish speaking population.[39] Some of these programs have been outlined in a 1973 publication:

- Language programs, to provide the Spanish speaking adults and school dropouts with the necessary education to obtain a high school diploma. Several such programs have been instituted in the New York area.[40]
- Veteran assistance in education. A 1972 Federal Grant of $1 million to the Puerto Rican Congress of New Jersey helped train 4,100 Spanish speaking veterans and provided them with adequate educational and vocational preparation.[41]
- The Committee was also instrumental in obtaining specific information in the 1970 census concerning the Spanish speaking sector of society. Such information had never been obtained before.
- The Committee made major progress in emphasizing the need for Spanish speaking administrators, especially in areas with large Spanish populations.

In November 1970 a Federal program was implemented by both the U.S. Civil Service Commission and the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish Speaking People. This plan demands an intensification in recruitment of Spanish-speaking personnel at the federal level.[42]

In this Federal study, the Puerto Rican sector usually trails behind the Mexican and the Cuban in areas such as income, property, education, and rate of literacy. These statistics, however, are not gathered for the purpose of making illogical comparisons or passing any kind of judgement on any specific minority. It is simply unfair to compare the Puerto Rican with the Mexican, who has been on the mainland for a longer period of time and, consequently, has already had his initial period of acculturation. Neither is it fair to compare him with the Cuban, since many of the Cuban exiles came from professional backgrounds or had sufficient education to ameliorate their condition.

We should make reference to one more feature of Puerto Rican life on the mainland: the welfare check. Although pertinent and updated information was unavailable specifically for the Puerto Rican, we did interview two case workers from the New York City Department of Social Services. We were able to determine from these interviews that the idea of the Puerto Rican "living off the fat of the land" is an exaggerated picture. There are abuses in the system, as there are abuses in practically every system created by man. Yet, according to these case workers, the Puerto Rican is often forced to apply for welfare assistance. Having examined the severe cultural shock which these people encounter on the mainland, we can easily see that an individual who

has been faced with nothing but failure all his life is less likely to be motivated to try for something better. Conformity to mediocrity sets in, and, after having been kicked down several times the Puerto Rican either gives up trying or seeks a form of escape, usually in the form of drug addiction.

One of the case workers had formerly worked in the Medical Department at the Waverly Station. She reported that the majority of the drug addicts she interviewed were Puerto Ricans and Blacks, most of whom were school drop-outs and had histories of unemployment. When we asked her why she no longer worked at the Medical Department she told us that she had requested a transfer to another department, because in the five years she worked with drug addicts she never saw any sincere efforts being made to prevent drug addiction and the rehabilitation programs were less than adequate. Then we inquired of her: "How would you go about setting up a drug addiction prevention program? Where would you start?" Her response: "At the schools...not the high schools, that's usually too late for some of them. But we have to whet their appetite for something better at the elementary school level ... If we let them enter adolescence with a destroyed self-concept, well, we've lost them..."

So the cycle is complete. And, after our 360° tour of the different levels of Puerto Rican society in New York, we come back to basically the same place from which we started: education is the answer. The responsibility falls on the shoulders of the educators and the educators can no longer plead professionalism

as an excuse for uninvolvement in the problems of the students. Obviously, educators must have some assistance in helping the Puerto Rican cope with a world that grows increasingly more threatening every day. In the Metropolitan area programs such as A.S.P.I.R.A. have made considerable progress in helping troubled youngsters to cope with themselves. Obviously, not every educator is a psychologist, but we could handle many problems before they grow too big for the child and make their indelible mark on the future adult.

The Puerto Rican feels he has been a victim of the pressure cooker long enough, and he is steamed about it. He refuses to continue living up to the image of "loser," and he has finally learned to aggressively demand the rights which are his by virtue of his citizenship and by virtue of his humanity.

VI. Conclusion - The Future

School systems are obviously not going to foster disorder or organize consciousness sessions which will end up attacking the school's shortcomings. We may demand that the school be involved, but we cannot demand that it be masochistic. And it would indeed be surprising if the Puerto Rican community were to find its voice in programs sponsored by or spokesmen hired by the boards of education. The initiative in this case is up to the community. The needs of the people will be met to the extent that demands are made known.

The Puerto Rican community still needs to be educated as to its rights and responsibilities. But many are beginning to see the wisdom of playing by the system's rules: communities are beginning to organize, to ask questions, to attend meetings of the boards of education. New A.S.P.I.R.A. clubs are being set up in Chicago, Waterbury, Rochester, and throughout New Jersey.[43]

The new spirit is tentative, but has already started to pay off. The awakened interest in Puerto Rican pupils is a direct result of pressure from an awakening Puerto Rican community. Admittedly, an increase in enrollment is not equivalent to an increase in the level of education, but it is the first essential step on the road to reform.

If we take a broad view at the facts we have reviewed, one cannot but be impressed at the progress that has been made in a relatively short time. Even more impressive, however, is the amount of work which still needs to be done. Two themes must be singled out because of the relevance to the further

progress of studies on bilingualism: 1) The complexity of language functioning, and 2) The complexity of the social settings in which language is employed. We have already seen how a lack of awareness of these very different sets of complexities has frequently led to unjustified generalizations.

One key to improvements inside the school is informed action from outside the school. If the Puerto Rican wants to make a major impact on the schools he will have to do it through specific recommendations, supported by specific data. No school system no matter how humane its intentions, is likely to produce a comprehensive program of education for Puerto Rican children unless the Puerto Rican community suggests one and presses for its implementation.

We must learn from past mistakes. In the future, we must try to avoid the error committed by the New York school system. In response to strong but non-specific demands from the Puerto Rican community, the school system has been riding off in all directions with the city's bilingual programs. The parent cannot afford to leave education entirely up to the educator.

At the same time, it would be childish for the educator to delay or refuse reforms because the community has not demanded them. The professional pride and professional conscience of the educator should urge him to bring about beneficial changes.

The fact seems to be that parents are more concerned about the children's education than the educators. The state of affairs will not improve until the school faces up to its responsibilities and educators decide to improve their performance, rather than their image.

Specifically, then we could list the following as suggestions for future action on the part of the community:

- Carefully, assess the needs of the children in terms of language, academic subjects, tutorial services, extracuricular activities, etc.
- State explicitly the community's expectations of the school.
- State explicity the objectives which the community feels education should fulfill.
- State the role which should be played by the parent in the activities of the school.

With such specific points carefully spelled out, community respresentatives are now able to dialogue with community officials on a professional level. Such group discussion would assist the entire community in clarifying confusing issues and in becoming aware of their right to petition reasonable changes.

The school in turn, should listen to the requests of the community. If any requests need to be refused, a logical and simple explanation in layman terminology should be issued. (We have all at one time or another been victims of unintelligible jargon and know what the typical reactions are to such utterances.)

The school-community relations of the future should be the type of relations which characterize intelligent parties. It will no longer be the community suspecting the gringos and the school refusing to hear spics who make a lot of noise.

Dialogue is necessary to any meaningful relationship. Once the basis for such communication is established, our insecurities

and our fears can take a back seat to our concern for the effective education of the child. This is the right of the child, and we cannot abdicate for him.

The future of the Puerto Rican child's acculturation can be explained in terms of responsibility: If the community and the school face their individual and collective responsibilities, we will produce a generation of Puerto Ricans free from the physical and mental prisons which have held him back. If we forfeit our responsibilities, then we might as well tell the child to forfeit his hopes and the nation to forfeit its future.

APPENDIX I

	Union County	Essex County
TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD		
All households	1,261	9,024
Male primary individual	79	678
Female primary individual	12	225
Husband-wife households	987	5,995
Households with other male head	26	315
Households with female head	157	1,811
SCHOOL ENROLLMENT		
Persons, 16 to 21 years old.	598	4,207
Not attending school	381	2,730
Not high school graduates	276	2,054
Percent of total	46.2	48.8
YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED		
Persons 25 years and over	1,974	13,228
No school years completed	82	928
Elementary 1 to 4 years	295	2,187
5 to 7 years	391	3,198
8 years	243	1,773
High School 1 to 3 years	394	2,626
4 years	402	1,916
College 1 to 3 years	92	335
4 years of more	75	265
Median school years completed	8.9	8.2
Percent high school graduates	28.8	19.0
FAMILY INCOME IN 1969		
Median income: Families	$8,495	$6,142
Families and unrelated persons	$8,041	$5,649

Taken from: 1970 Census - Economic Characteristics of Persons of Puerto Rican Birth or Parentage: 1970. Tables P-7 and P-8.

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[27]Emile Durkheim. Selected Writings. Anthony Giddens, tr. (Cambridge University Press, 1972) p. 204.

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[31]Stanley Caplan and Ronald Ruble. "A Study of Culturally Imposed Factors on School Achievements in a Metropolitan Area." Journal of Education Research. (Vol. 58, No. 1, 1964.) p. 21.

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[36]Ibid.

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[38]Margolis, pp. 12-13.

[39]Americanos de Habla Hispana, p. 27.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Ibid., pp. 26-27.

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